(c) The suggestion was not taken up for discussion. India's position in SAARC has been that this is a contentious political issue and cannot therefore figure in SAARC deliberations.

Programmes for Amelioration of weaker sections of the Society

4419. SHRI MAHENDRA PRASAD: Will the Minister of PLANNING be pleased to state :

(a) whether programmes for amelioration of weaker section of the society and eradication of poverty are proposed to be reoriented for implementation under the Eighth Five Year Plan ;

(b) if so, the details of the reorientation contemplated in respect of these programmes ; and

(c) the target, fixed for eradication of poverty ?

THE MINISTER OF PLANNING AND THE MINISTER OF PROGRAMME IMPLEMENTATION (SHRI MADHAVSINH SOLANKI):

(a) and (b) The exercises relating to formulation of the Eighth Five Year Plan (1990-95) have just started and hence, specific details about strategy for implementation of programmes referred to in the question cannot be given.

(c) The Seventh Plan sets the target of reducing the number of persons below poverty line to 5 percent by 2000A.D.

Red Cross Personnel Killed/Injured in Sri Lanka

4420. SHRI MAHENDRA PRASAD: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state :

(a) whether some Red Cross volunteers/officers have been killed or injured in Sri Lanka in connection with the IPKF operations during the recent months ;

(b) if so, the details thereof; and

(c) what is Government's reaction thereto including that by way of compensation to the victims or their families ?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI K. NATWAR SINGH) (a) and (b) On the 4th August, 1988, a Red Cross jeep going from Kankesanturai to Mullaitivu was belown up by a landmine planted by the LTTE. The driver was killed on the spot and Mr. Gurmukh Singh and Dr. Katyal, officers of the Indian Red Cross, were seriously wounded. They were evacuated by the IPKF to a nearby hospital, where Mr. Gurmukh Singh succumbed to his injuries.

(c) Government deplores this wanton killing of Red Cross personnel on a humanitarian mission in Sri Lanka. The question of compensation is a matter which concerns the Indian Red Cross Society but Government understand that this is receiving sympathetic consideration.

Attacks on Hindus/Buddhists in Bangladesh

4421. SHRI D.B. CHANDRE GOWDA: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state :

(a) whether it is a fact that there have been large-scale attacts on the lives of Hindus and Buddhists in Bangladesh; and

(b) if so, whether Government propose to discuss this issue with the Bangladesh Government ?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI K. NATWAR SINGH) ; (a) Government have seen reports of some violence against members of the minority communities in Bangladesh.

(b) The Bangladesh Government have assured our High Com mission in Dhaka that the interests of the minorities in that country will be safeguarded.

Indo-Nepal Meeting

4422. SHRI SHIV PRATAP MISHRA : Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state :

(a) whether the first Indo-Nepal meeting has been held in Kathmandu in the second week of August, 1988;

(b) if so, the details of discussions held; and

(c) the outcome thereof?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI K. NATWAR SINGH) ; (a) The first meeting of the Indo-Nepal Joint Commission was held in Kathmandu on the 13th August, 1988.

(b) The meeting discussed organisational matters regarding the functioning of the Joint Commission.

(c) It was decided to appoint three Sub-Commissions—on Trade and Transit, on Economic and Industrial Cooperation, and on Water Resources-to deal with various subjects of economic cooperation.

Jobs for Blind in Central Government

4423. SHRI CHATURANAN MISHRA : Will the PRIME MINISTER be pleased to state the number of jobs which have been made available for blinds in A and B Groups in the Central Government Services during the last one year ?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF PERSONNEL, PUBLIC GRIEVANCES AND PENSIONS AND THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF HOME AFFAIRS (SHRI P. CHIDAMBARAM) : Since there is no reservation for the physically handicapped (including the Blind) in Group 'A' & Group 'B' services ,the statistical information not centrally monitored and is, therefore, not readily available.

Purchase of Blankets for Army

4424. SHRI SURESH KALMADI : Will the Minister of DEFENCE be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that the purchase of blankets for use by the Army from the NTC and BIC are causing huge losses to the national exchequer because of procurement of the same by the NTC and BIC from private companies instead of manufacturing there;

(b) if so, the details of the requirements of the blankets for the Army and its policy of purchases ; and

(c) what steps have been taken to avoid inflated prices due to procurement from private companies by Government undertakings and supplying the same to the Army?